DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 332 149 CS 010 562

AUTHOR Schiller, Susan
TITLE Temporality and Affect: Useful Starting Points in Interpretation.
PUB DATE Mar 91
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (42nd, Boston, MA, April 21-23, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Behavior; Case Studies; *Emotional Response; Films; Higher Education; *Memory; *Reader Response; *Reader Text Relationship; Reading Research; Schemata (Cognition)
IDENTIFIERS Aesthetic Reading; Affective Response; Meaningfulness; *Rite of Love and Death (Film)

ABSTRACT

Empirical research into reading theory suggests people begin a reading transaction with an affective response and then primarily rely on memory. They may elect to use imagination as an option to influence the process, but when the affective response is overwhelming, the imagination lies dormant while memory dominates the transaction. A research project juxtaposed the transactions of two students who were overwhelmed by Yukio Mishima's film, "The Rite of Love and Death." One student imaginatively placed herself into a schema as a means of locating meaning, while the other student relied on known narrative constructs. Both students evaluated their transactions and considered them essential parts of meaning. Affective starting points appear to promote analysis and understanding of cultural and historical influences in reading and writing tasks, and in such a function support a contextual basis for making meaning. (Author/SG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED332149

Dr. Susan Schiller
Central Michigan University
Department of English
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan 48859

Temporality and Affect: Useful Starting Points in Interpretation

I designed an ethnographic research project from a reader response perspective and traced the interpretive process of students in an introductory literature class. Half of the students viewed Mishima's film The Rite of Love and Death, while the other half read his short story "Patriotism." The reading process of both groups was interrupted at selected points so that they could write short answers to survey questions about the reading process. Then each group prepared an oral presentation which they later presented to the alternate group. Finally, every student wrote an essay about their entire transaction, which consisted of reading, speaking and writing.

Today I am going to talk about how temporality and affect can assist learning. The two case studies I use as examples, represent only a small portion of this study. Even so I hope you will be persuaded to think about ways temporality and affect can become useful starting points for meaning-making.

Within the constraints of my research, temporality functions on two levels. First, it is the duration of the interpretive transaction. It includes a before and after stage that surrounds the time used to read the text. Second, temporality is a schema that connects with affect when meaning making occurs. I use David Bleich's definition of affect. He says "affect is a kind of raw emotion and is usually describable in very familiar terms—anger, love, jealousy, indignation, contentment, and so on" (11). Affect is further placed into two categories: positive or negative. I am interested in the way my subjects connect emotion to what Susan Aylwin calls "commitment scripts."

CS010562

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Dr Susan Schiller
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Commitment scripts contain "interrelated themes of the future, action, and the body" (137). and are created by a sense of commitment to a particular aspect of living, for example, careers, marriages, hobbies, passing exams, and other behavior patterns called upon in socialization. Emotions occur because there is a crisis in a commitment script. "Generally, emotions which open the future are good, those which close it are bad"(139). For example, love would be seen as a good emotion because it usually opens the future, but death would be a bad emotion because it closes the future. Such a perspective on emotion depends upon a temporal relationship between the past, present and future. Even though affect and temporality may be discussed in these familiar terms, we should not lose sight of the relationship they share. Temporality and affect are permanently bonded, and their relationship can shift to accommodate pressures each imposes on meaning making.

Results from my study indicate that some students have learned to recognize temporality as a schema which might be used as a starting point in meaning-making. However, it also appears that most students have not yet learned to acknowledge emotion in a similar way. I want you to consider the writing samples of two students which lead me to believe temporality and affect are useful starting points in meaning making. Before they could write about their transaction they had to make meaning from a text which countered traditional Western values about suicide and death, and they had to find ways to account for their affective responses. It is not surprising that emotion was an important part of their analysis, but their references to particular emotions and the way these emotions shaped meaning reveals how cognition and affect combine in the interpretive process. Thirty-two referents to emotion appear in the essays of these two students. Twenty-four refer to negative emotion: Five are named in the before stage, fourteen in the during stage, and five in the after

stage. These figures show that students had to accommodate a large amount of negative emotion in the during stage if they were to make meaning. Some of the negative emotion in the during stage is carried over from the before stage. In anticipation of this classroom experience, students felt powerless, fearful, reluctant, nervous, and apprehensive. When they were engaged in the text their negative emotions ranged from worry, confusion, and irritation to anguish, nausea and anger. Unlike the before and during stage, the after stage is balanced between positive and negative emotion. Five emotions were negative and four were positive. They wrote about feeling disgust, distraught, uneasy, and horrified, but they also wrote about understanding, determination, calmness and arousal. These students certainly corroborate Alice Brand's observations that, "Writers seem to draw strength from emotional antithesis . . . [that] writing often seems propelled by a collision, a tug-of-war between positive and negative feelings" (15).

Their process also reveals an inseparable bond between temporality and affect. Ernst Cassirer explains this bond. He says:

> It is the category of cause and effect which transforms the mere intuition of succession into the idea of a unitary temporal order of events. The simple distinction of separate points in time must be transformed into the concept of a mutual dynamic dependence between them, time as a form of pure intuition must be permeated with the function of causal judgement . . . before the immediate feeling of time can be transformed into the systematic concept of time as a condition and content of knowledge (218).

A person's subjective response which occurs in the category of cause and effect provides affect. Because cause and effect depends upon a temporal succession, temporality and affect become inseparably bonded in the interpretive process. People can draw from one or the other, or both, when they start the process. Both students I discuss here demonstrate this bond, and demonstrate different levels of awareness about the bond.

One student wrote non-literary types of meaning which might be considered inappropriate for a literature class. Temporality became a schema she specifically used as a starting point for interpretation. The second student wrote a literary interpretation any teacher would give an "A." Her essay also validates ideas in subjective criticism. Both students struggled to accommodate negative and positive emotion, but both learned to value literature in new ways—a way that had meaning for them as individuals—but also a way that was relevant to larger social contexts which require meaning-making, As the duration of the transaction proceeded, the students alternated between thoughts and feelings and each became increasingly aware of their interpretive process. This lead me to consider the systematic connection between time, affect, and interpretation.

Carol's transaction is based upon Mishima's film, and her essay explicitly organizes her transaction into before, during, and after stages. She quickly justifies this organization when she lets her reader know she does not think these stages are basic or trivial, and she connects each stage to cognition and affect. She says "each stage involve[s] a different attitude, mood, and expectation."

The description of her "before" stage clearly identifies Carol as a student who is deeply responsive to peer pressure and social situations. She was nervous, afraid to have an open mind, and fearful of misinterpreting the text. She could not establish any relevance for the assignment, and she agreed with complaints other students confided in her. As the film began she writes that she "was looking around the room to see how the other students were reacting . . . [but] no one seemed to have any reaction...[she] therefore decided to be daring and to experience the film as if [she] were alone in the room.". The beginning of the film made her feel tense and worried, but she became "more involved" when

she "understood the protagonist's dilemma." She became "curious" and "was no longer concerned" about the writing assignment which would follow. She writes that her "attitude and mood changed" as a direct result of her need to know the end of the story. These emotions change again when the film depicts a bloody suicide. At that point, Carol became "angry, disgusted and sad." She couldn't forget a last night she had with an old boyfriend who was forced to move far away. "It was not possible for [her] to disassociate what [the characters] may have been experiencing emotionally from what [she] experienced emotionally." She says [her] "expectations for [the characters'] last good-bye were not portrayed" in the film. Her immediate response to this film left her "confused" "sickened by the graphics," and "angered." When she left the classroom, she automatically began a conversation with another group member who informed her about Japanese culture—information Carol needed in the "during" stage but didn't have.

Although the additional information was helpful to Carol, the characters' "decision to commit suicide [became] an important enigma" to her. She was unable to forget the film and began the after stage attempting to understand the enigma as well as her response. In this stage, her analysis begins with a memory. Like the characters in the film Carol has also had had to "choose the lesser of two evils" in order to solve a problem. However, the personal identification she felt was destroyed when the characters solve their problem through ritual suicide, a solution that she says has "absolutely nothing in common with the solutions [she] would see open to [herself]." She says this turn in the story left her feeling as if "the problem persisted." Consequently, she decides that an "unresolved mood clearly marks the "after" stage"

Carol's final interpretation is about her process of meaning-making rather than about textual content. Even though she believes her process is different

from that of her peers, she validates her experience when she concludes the essay. She writes:

> How I interacted with the text, I am sure, is different than the interactions my classmates experienced. I am glad that this paper required me to explore this transaction because i now see the way I interpret a text is not necessarily wrong. I do not think that I would ever have examined my role in the reader/text experience had it not been for this assignment.

Carol appears to have reached this conclusion through a series of moves between emotion and time. She situates herself into a temporal pattern and uses it as a safety zone. She doesn't know how to use emotion as a starting point, so she uses what she knows and then "dares" to combine the temporal features with the affective features. Once the threat of her negative emotions can be framed by the safety zone, she is able tc explore the complexity of her transaction. I would guess, that she has had previous success with narrative structures and therefore she selects it quite naturally. I don't believe she is consciously selecting a narrative structure however, but rather that she is responding to temporality and affect as a condition of her response as well as a condition of knowledge. Her response to temporality and affect then leads her interpretive process in ways that are relevant for her, but which also answer an exigence imposed by the project.

Lena was the only student in this project who interprets "Patriotism" as Mishima's biographers suggest. Her interpretation concerns two points, one literary and one personal. She thinks the story is about a calming effect love and honor can impose on people, but she also thinks that literature conforms to the individual—that is readers see what they want to see in literature. She even names this aspect of literature "Literature's Unique Identity." The duality of her interpretation has arisen because she has used emotion and temporality in a way that lets her value both the objective and the subjective qualities in

interpretation.

I have to speculate about Lena's before stage because she never refers to it directly. She embeds an implication in a concluding statement that leads me to believe that she felt a lack of control over her situation thus entering the transaction from an affective position. If I am misreading the implication, her lack of control may actually control the duration of the transaction more so than I actually think it is. I choose to believe, however, that Lena was able to counteract her initial negative response because she ends her essay with a statement about intense control rather than no control.

Lena was greatly frustrated in the during stage and writes about irritation, anger, indignation, nausea and amazement at her own surprise when she finds her attitudes shifting. She says her strong sense of feminism caused her to see the young husband as a "selfish chauvinist" and caused her to be irritated by the young wife's "willing submissiveness." She was disturbed because "the fire of [her] feminism cloud[ed] [her] interpretive abilities." At this point in her transaction she deliberates between affect and reason, but affect controls her transaction. As the story continues, however, she internalizes the connection between love and death, which Mishima explicates, and her attitudes about the husband and wife change. Although she was surprised by her changing attitudes, she later justifies the change and makes it clear that the literary interpretation she makes has helped her to adjust her feelings. Moreover, the adjustment itself leads her into specific subjective realizations about the reading process. About her personal response she writes:

> I was aware that this response had been quite dynamic. My initial attitude of frustration, linked with a sense of lack of control, had altered to one of determination and I gained a sense of ability to alter my own situations.

But she refers to her group members when she writes her final interpretation:

> Each individual perceived exactly what he chose to as seen through his particular filters coloured with his personal life experiences, attitudes, values and culture. It is this quality which gives literature its own unique identity. It conforms to the growing changing individual.

Bleich tells us that "Everyone thinks of the story as an object and no one thinks of it as an experience." Lena's essay clearly describes and analyzes an experience. Her after stage is filled with analysis of affect and temporality, and the literary analysis one would expect is overshadowed by her emphasis on emotion. This makes her final interpretation even more revealing. She does not focus on the affective response alone or even subordinate its influence. Instead, she gives equal weight to the objective and the affective. Yet as she writes about her process, we can easily see that the literary interpretation arose out of the affective response. She attempts to understand this and automatically organizes her analysis into temporal categories. She groups temporality and affect in order to trace the growth of her interpretation. She does this because she needs to understand the causal relationship between what Bleich calls the "objective essence" and the "subjective response."

The students in this study learned new things about the reading process and about the way they make meaning. Their most basic change was in recognizing the reading process itself, and recognizing it as a dynamic process. They saw the process as a chronology—that is a process segmented by "before", "during", and "after" stages. They saw a relationship between what they know and what is new. They began to see a temporal quality in information and connected this quality to ways in which the old helps to inform the new. Some knew they used temporality and affect and were able to discuss such usage, while others seemed unaware of how affect and temporality functioned in their process of meaning-making. The students also wanted to make meaning on two levels: on one hand, either a subjective or objective

interpretation, on the other hand, an interpretation that blends the subjective with the objective. Their interpretations were not restricted to textual themes, and were assisted by social interventions at both levels. They worked at finding the range of meanings that are possible when we treat meaning-making as an act of negotiation between self and text.

The students in my study demonstrate that if they are to reach interpretation, they need a productive way of responding to emotion. In 1938 Louise Rosenblatt told us that "reason should arise in a matrix of feeling" (Rosenblatt 227), yet the field of composition theory has chosen to focus on cognition. As a result, our view of what people do when they read and write is not yet whole. There is a gap because we have chosen to ignore the role emotion assumes. Our research should attach significance to emotion and study ways emotion influences meaning-making. We need to focus on the psychological function as it combines with the semantic rather than treating the two aspects of interpretation as if they were distinct poles. Paul Ricoeur, who argues for an integration of the psychological and semantic functions explains:

> To *feel*, in the emotional sense of the word, is to make *ours* what has been put at a distance by thought in its objectifying phase. Feelings therefore have a very complex kind of intentionality. They are not merely inner states but interiorized thoughts....Feeling is not contrary to thought. It is thought made ours (156).

Literary skills most readers learn in school emphasize the semantic function of discourse but disregard the psychological function. Students are not taught that feelings "complete" thought in any way. Indeed, they have been taught to be suspicious of feelings. Obviously, we will not find it easy or simple to integrate emotion into theory or practice, but the challenge is compelling. It is imperative that we begin; and we can begin by studying ways affect and cognition combine.

References

Aylwin, Susan. Structure in Thought and Feeling. London and New York: Methuen, 1985.

Bleich, David. Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism. Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English 1975.

Brand, Alice Glarden. The Psychology of Writing. New York: Greenwood Press 1989.

Cassirer, Ernst. The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Volume I Language. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955.

Mishima, Yukio. "Patriotism." Norton Anthology of Short Fiction. R.V. Cassill New York: W.W.Norton & Company Inc., 1978. 966-985.

Nathan, John. Mishima. Boston-Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1974

Ricoeur, Paul. "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling." Critical Inquiry. 5 (1978): 143-159.

The Rite of Love and Death. Dir. Yukio Mishima. Aoi Studios, 1965. 28 min.

Rosenblatt, Louise M. Literature as Exploration. 4th edition. New York: Modern Language Association, 1983.

Abstract

The empirical research I have conducted in reading theory suggests people begin a reading transaction with an affective response and then primarily rely on memory. They may elect to use imagination as an option to influence the process, but when the affective response is overwhelming, the imagination lies dormant while memory dominants the transaction. This paper arises from this research; it juxtoposes the transactions of two students who were affectively overwhelmed by Yukio Mishima's The Rite of Love and Death. One student imaginatively placed herself into a schema as a means of locating meaning, while the other student relied on known narrative constructs. Both students evaluated their transaction and considered it an essential part of meaning. Affective starting points appear to promote analysis and understanding of cultural and historical influences in reading and writing tasks and in this function supports a contextual basis for making meaning.